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ABSTRACT

The challenge for community colleges is two-fold: to provide relevant training to maintain their competitiveness and to do it for an increasingly diverse population. Furthermore, the advent of the information revolution has placed new demands on education as one of the primary means of access to economic well-being and upward mobility. Administering a community college such as San Francisco City College, where the student body is ethnically diverse and heavily weighted in favor of minorities, entails particular problems and challenges. Problems arise out of differences in values, leading to different priorities in the allocation of resources for programs and services. In particular, conflicts arise when the needs and desires of students clash with those of faculty, or when the needs and interests of faculty become a source of friction with administrators. For example, in hiring decisions, faculty are often more concerned with the academic accomplishments of candidates, while administrators and students may be more concerned with bringing in faculty who are sensitive to the needs of minority students. Racial/ethnic loyalty plays a part as well. In the San Francisco Community College District, such conflicts are seen as inevitable, but not necessarily destructive. To minimize negative effects, the district emphasizes leadership that is cognizant of and sensitive to the following: (1) the unique qualities of a multi-ethnic, multicultural urban institution; (2) well-defined and fair decision-making processes; (3) and the involvement of community advisory committees made up of representatives of the various ethnic and cultural communities in San Francisco. District successes, such as increasing enrollments, consistently large numbers of transfer students, and broad minority representation among the faculty, demonstrate that ethnically diverse groups of people can work together effectively. (GFW)

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The Multicultural Urban Community College: Conflict and Achievement

Hilary Hsu

July 9, 1990

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THE MULTICULTURAL URBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

CONFLICT AND ACHIEVEMENT

Leadership 2000 Forum July 9, 1990

This conference is about leadership in community colleges. Our forum this morning will present one perspective on leadership, and that perspective is of an urban, multicultural and multi-ethnic institution. My presentation will naturally be from the vantage point of a chief executive officer.

In order to provide you with the context for what I am going to discuss, let me give you some demographic statistics about San Francisco. In the 1980 Census, San Francisco's residents were made up of the following: White - 52%, Black - 12.5%, Asians - 23%, and Hispanics - 12.5%. In addition to the ethnic groups, we also have 20.0% to 25.0% who are gays and lesbians. The 1990 Census by all indications will show a community where there is no majority. San Francisco is, therefore, where the State of California is projected to be in fifteen to twenty years. Our District's Student Body is even more heavily weighted in favor of minorities: Asian Americans 45%, Whites 25%, Hispanics 14% and Blacks 10%.

San Francisco is not unique because people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds have to learn to live and work together. What differentiates San Francisco from other communities is that the residents of San Francisco have to live and work together more or less as equals, with no one group playing the dominant role in the economic and political decision making process. What is applicable to the City as a whole is also germane to the college district. As a matter of fact, there are additional considerations that are unique to American higher education that make the challenges faced by our District even more formidable. My presentation will attempt to

identify and analyze the conflicts, strains and challenges existing in our District. I will also describe some of the methodologies we have used to reduce such conflicts. Lastly, I will cite several major achievements and how they came about.

Why do cultural differences create problems? Let me tell you a real-life story that may illustrate the point: I have a cousin who a couple of years ago married a Caucasian man. My cousin, who I will call Jennifer, is an excellent homemaker and a good cook. She is especially proficient in preparing chicken dishes. As a dutiful wife, she invites her parents-in-law to dinner quite frequently. Each time her in-laws came to dinner and she had a chicken dish, Jennifer would pick up a thigh and/or a drumstick and offered them to the mother-in-law. The first time Jennifer did this, her mother-in-law was delighted and expressed her appreciation. With each succeeding time, the mother-in-law became less and less enthusiastic, for, as with the majority of Caucasians, she really prefers the chicken breast. After about half a dozen times, she became really annoyed and asked Jennifer why she insisted on her having the dark meat and told Jennifer that if she didn't mind, she would rather have the breast. Jennifer was flabbergasted. Luckily for Jennifer, she was at least assertive enough to explain that she thought that everybody preferred the dark meat part of the chicken because all her Chinese friends and relatives did. Her offering it to the mother-in-law was to demonstrate her respect for her. Needless to say, ever since that day, there is no more problem at that dinner table and the relationship between the mother-in-law and my cousin improved significantly.

The story demonstrates a number of things. First of all, conflicts occur because of difference in values. Secondly, resolution of the conflict can be obtained when (1) we communicate, and (2) individual's needs are accommodated. Lastly, the

relationship between individuals or groups will be on a stronger footing after the conflict has been resolved.

Of all the institutions in this country, colleges and universities are the ones where values play the most predominant role. Since the establishment of Harvard College in the 1600's, institutions of higher learning in the United States have prided themselves as the protectors of the truth and the discoverers of knowledge. The measurement of quality of scholarship, be it teaching or research, has been more often than not, based on purity. That is, the more removed from real life applications the better. You have all heard the slogan or shared the perception that pure research is better than applied research, because the latter reeks of commercialism. The reference to higher education as the Ivory Tower has actually two connotations: one is that it exists unto itself, uncontaminated by worldliness. The other is that it is not for everyone. In order to gain access to the Ivory Tower, conditions and requirements established by the institution must be satisfied.

These traditional values of American higher education have historically been reinforced by three others: tenure, academic freedom and the significant role of the Faculty. Let me hasten to declare that these values and traditions are precisely what made American higher education the best in the world. These are the values that propel American research to the forefront of the rest of the world and keep it there. Unfortunately, these traditional values are also at the heart of the conflicts currently rampant on American campuses, especially those of urban community colleges.

The Second World War was the first major conflict where strategic advantage was gained not so much by human expertise and leadership but by technological development. The Second World War ushered in a new era, as a result, an era when

technological development determines the positioning, in terms of political and economic power of nations. I believe that it was in recognition of this reality that President Harry Truman established, as a national agenda, a network of community colleges throughout the country. President Truman realized that in order for America to maintain its leadership position in the world, both politically and economically, her people's education level must be raised. It was no longer adequate to be in possession of vast amount of manpower, it must also be supplemented by brainpower. The international marketplace would become more competitive and community colleges were designed to be a major partner in the development of human resources. In other words, community colleges were to be a significant factor in people's fulfillment of the American dream.

Approximately a quarter of a century after the declaration by President Truman on community colleges, America was in the throes of the Information Revolution. As you all know, the Information Revolution has changed all of our lives, both individually and collectively. More important for us who work in the field of education, it places an even greater premium on knowledge. Put another way, the access to knowledge has become, more than ever before, the access to social and economic survival in the very least, to the fulfillment of the American Dream for most. In such a reality, people's perception of institutions of higher learning has dramatically changed. Instead of the traditionally held values such as independence, detachment from commercialism, knowledge for knowledge sake, etc., people began to view higher education as one of the means, and an ever more important means, for survival and for the achievement of a better life. Institutions of higher learning are now being scrutinized under a very different light. To quote Dr. Gary H. Quehl, President of the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, "There is a serious and growing polarization of views between on-campus and off-campus constituencies concerning the role and

performance of higher education and the challenges facing it. There is an urgent need to understand what our citizens want and expect of higher education, and what our colleges and universities can do and are doing to help meet the nation's needs. The current challenge for higher education is not merely a challenge of communication but a challenge of substance." This is especially true for community colleges. We are the people's college. We have open doors. We welcome all who can benefit from our programs and services. These realities take on special significance for an urban institution, for concomitant to the developments described above, the inner cities of America have become more ethnically and culturally more diverse, and that adds an entirely new dimension to the challenges we face.

The conflicts in a multicultural urban community college occur in different areas and on different levels. Of course, many of the conflicts will go away if adequate financial resources are available. However, it is almost by definition that such resources will never be adequate. Even when resources are adequate at one time, new needs will be created so that they will become inadequate. Therefore, my discussion is based on such a reality, as it is in San Francisco, and I am sure in most if not all higher education institutions.

Conflicts occur when there are differences in values, leading to disparate prioritizations in the allocation of resources. When resources are not sufficient to meet all the needs, contradictory loyalties surface. Let's look at the various constituencies of a college. Whether a college is multicultural or homogeneous, the following groups are readily defined:

(1) Students - let's not forget them, they are the reason why we are there

(2) Faculty - they are the reason why the students are there

(3) Administrators - they are the ones who coordinate, facilitate, initiate, monitor, and generally implement institutional policy

(4) Trustees - they are the representatives of the community and thereby the authority. On the other hand, accountability is expected from them in terms of the college's performance

(5) Community - they are the people we pledge to serve, and through our service, the well-being of the community is expected to be improved.

In this age of consumerism, students generally have become more knowledgeable about what they expect from the colleges. They, however, as a group, most of the time are not very forceful in voicing the displeasures they experience at the college, except under extraordinary circumstances. Of course, conflicts related to students are usually between them and the faculty. The additional dimension in a multi-ethnic, multicultural college is that the lack of sensitivity on the part of faculty toward minority students is more often cited as the source of problem. This conflict very often becomes the source of friction between faculty and administration. Let me give you an example. It probably has happened on your campuses also.

A faculty leader, who is deemed an excellent teacher before certain groups, recently remarked that he taught all students the same way. There was no uncertainty in this person's conviction that he was right. Many of us realize that the teaching process should take into consideration the students' learning process. The latter has been attracting a lot of attention and interest from researchers in education, such as Professor Patricia Cross of Berkeley. For administration to work on this, no matter how sensitively, would be perceived to be interfering with academic freedom. Should a responsible administration <u>not</u> deal with this situation? Bear in mind that this teacher's

belief is probably quite prevalent, and it could be the reason for the high dropout rates of certain groups of students.

This example leads naturally to another area of conflict and that is the hiring of faculty and administrators. The example just cited illustrates one source of such conflict, especially in the hiring of faculty. In hiring their peers, faculty tend to be more concerned with their future colleagues' academic accomplishments and whether they fit the image they have for being faculty. Administrators, both from their own perspective as well as carrying out the policy of the Board, see the hiring of new faculty as an opportunity to bring in teachers who are sensitive to the needs of disadvantaged students, especially minority students. Existing faculty will charge that administration interferes with the hiring process with the result of lowering quality, while administration counters that faculty are only interested in the status quo, not committed to diversity, not interested in the well-being of minority students, etc.

This conflict in the hiring of faculty, as well as administrators, has an additional dimension. In a multi-ethnic, multicultural environment, the psychology of self-esteem of the different communities is extremely relevant. Each ethnic community is very sensitive to this and wants to be fairly represented in the institution's various employee categories. To be excluded is perceived to be intentional and an attack on the community's self-esteem and importance. Since there are already members of different communities in our faculty and administrative staff, this sensitivity plays a significant role in the interactions between constituencies as well as the various groups. If an individual candidate is not recommended, the community from which the person comes feels that it has been slighted or prejudiced against. In my case, if I choose Asian Americans from the finalists, both because of their qualifications and

their under-representation, I am accused of hiring my friends, though I don't even know them.

Out of this issue of an entire community's self-esteem and worth develops another phenomenon. Even in a homogeneous college setting, there is no uniformity of loyalty. Faculty tend to be loyal first to their own disciplines and departments, then to their colleagues, and finally to the institution. In a multi-ethnic, multicultural college, at least at this state of development, these different levels of loyalties are further complicated by loyalties to their own communities. Since none of the minority communities feels that it has achieved parity, socially, economically and politically, with the majority community, the well-being of that community takes on an importance that is bigger than the institution. The political and social agenda of that community is paramount. As different individuals, be they faculty or administrators, serve on various campus committees, they cannot divorce themselves from the role of being their communities' representatives, working to improve the well-being of those communities. Recent events in Canada illustrate this point very well. In Canada, the issue is not even as complicated as what we have been discussing. The difference of language alone is significant enough to break up the dominion. In San Francisco, we have tens of languages and cultures and historical backgrounds. The interaction among them is intense, because like most human conflicts, economic interests are at stake. As I mentioned earlier, community colleges are seen more and more as the gateway to a better life.

In San Francisco, we have made a commitment to bring our educational programs and services to where people live and work. We firmly believe that education not only will enrich both intellectually and materialistically individuals but also communities. Of course, no one can or will dispute with this philosophy. It is a

sound philosophy and a laudable one. Unfortunately, under funding restrictions, such a policy comes into conflict with one of the most fundamental needs of all people: the need to be compensated well. One measurement for how well we are paid, at least by unions, is to compare with our neighbors. As we disperse our programs into the different communities, their efficiencies drop. Given our funding mechanism, we must be as efficient as we are effective. Conflict arises when the only way to be able to pay higher wages is to increase efficiency, and the way to increase efficiency is to reduce or maybe even eliminate those classes offered in the communities, and bear in mind, these are the disadvantaged communities which we want to help and elevate. But that's the view of administration. Faculty see it very differently. Quality of education must be maintained. (Translation: low class size must be maintained.) Administrative staff should be reduced. Faculty are generally unaware that no matter what they are called, administrative functions still need to be performed. And unfortunately, more and more regulations, both Federal and State, are piled on top of institutions.

Where does the Governing Board fit into all of this? In an urban district such as San Francisco, the various ethnic communities have developed sufficient political awareness that they are well represented on the District's Board. As representatives of the different communities, Board members are sensitive to the issues discussed above. Actually they are usually ahead of the administrators in pushing for some of the new directions that create the conflicts.

Are the conflicts avoidable? I don't think so. A community college is an egalitarian institution, an institution that fosters social and economic evolution. It is also a facilitator in society's redistribution of wealth. And yet, as an institution of higher education, it has more traditions and value systems than most other American institutions, traditions that impede change. As such, therefore, some people will even

say that if a college does its job as society expects it to do, there will be many conflicts of the kind described here. Conflicts will also continue into the foreseeable future, because the needs of the parties cannot be all accommodated. But can conflicts be productive and not destructive? I think so. But we have to work at it. I have three suggestions. One is a state of mind. One is a general approach. The last one is a concrete example.

As a leader of a multi-ethnic, multicultural urban institution, he/she must be cognizant of and sensitive to all the above issues. He/she must be able to work with different groups as cultural equals. He/she must be able to convey across the board a sense of fairness, receptivity and respect. He/she must be able to articulate a vision for the institution that at once transcends all the various communities' different needs and aspirations and take care of them at the same time. The degree to which he/she is successful in accomplishing the above is also the degree of his/her success as the leader.

To paraphrase Harvard President Derek Bok's statement: "If you think processes are time consuming, try no process." When resources are inadequate, and everyone wants a piece of it, we need to rely on well-defined and as fair as possible processes. I will be the first to recognize that processes are implemented by human beings and the latter cannot be totally objective, processes are still our best solution. Once an institution has experience in working through processes and the people begin to gain confidence and trust in them, you will be surprised how similar people really are. On the other hand, even with good processes, you still may have to live with conflicts.

Lastly, a concrete example: In San Francisco, we have established community advisory committees for the various ethnic and cultural communities. The committees provide input to the educational planning process on the one hand, they also serve as the conduit to their respective communities on the other. Such a system does not solve all the problems, at times they even become pressure groups, but on balance, in the fifteen years or so of their existence, they have been very helpful.

What can I cite as achievements of the San Francisco Community College District? First and foremost, despite our internal conflicts, all segments of our District are committed to quality. Our reputation in the community is extremely good, as evidenced by the overwhelming support shown by the community and the fact that though San Francisco's general population is stagnant, or actually falling slightly, we have seen steady growth in our student enrollment. Our achievements are measured by statistics such as the following: Twenty thousand students at any one time are taking English as a Second Language; over twelve hundred transfer to the California State University each year, making City College the second largest transfer college in California; two of our vocational programs have been selected a couple of years ago by the Bay Area Council (an organization of business chief executive officers) as two of twelve most effective job training programs; we have already achieved the diversity in faculty as targeted by AB 1725, the California Community College Reform Act of 1988; our minority faculty is already in excess of one-third of our total faculty. Probably more important than all of the above statistics, our achievement as a multicultural, multi-ethnic urban community college is that we have demonstrated that diverse people can work together, despite the conflicts. Ours is not a melting pot. Each and every different community retains its culture and character. There is no one institutional culture, but a collection of cultures learning to exist together, learning to pull in the optimum direction for all.

In a very short time, about ten to fifteen years, San Francisco's demography has changed from a white dominated society to one which has no one single majority. The role played by the San Francisco Community College District, through its non-credit programs and City College of San Francisco, in facilitating such dramatic social, political and economic transition cannot be overstated. This has come about not without stress and strain in our institution, especially in the post-Proposition 13 era. Statewide, our community colleges have also contributed similarly to the changes occurring. The challenge for community colleges in the Post-Cold War economy is two-fold. One is to provide relevant training to maintain our competitiveness and two is how to do it for an ever increasing diverse population. We must be successful in both, or we will no longer be the strongest country in the world.

Thank you for your attention.

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